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**OHUN ROY,
OF MODERN INDIA**

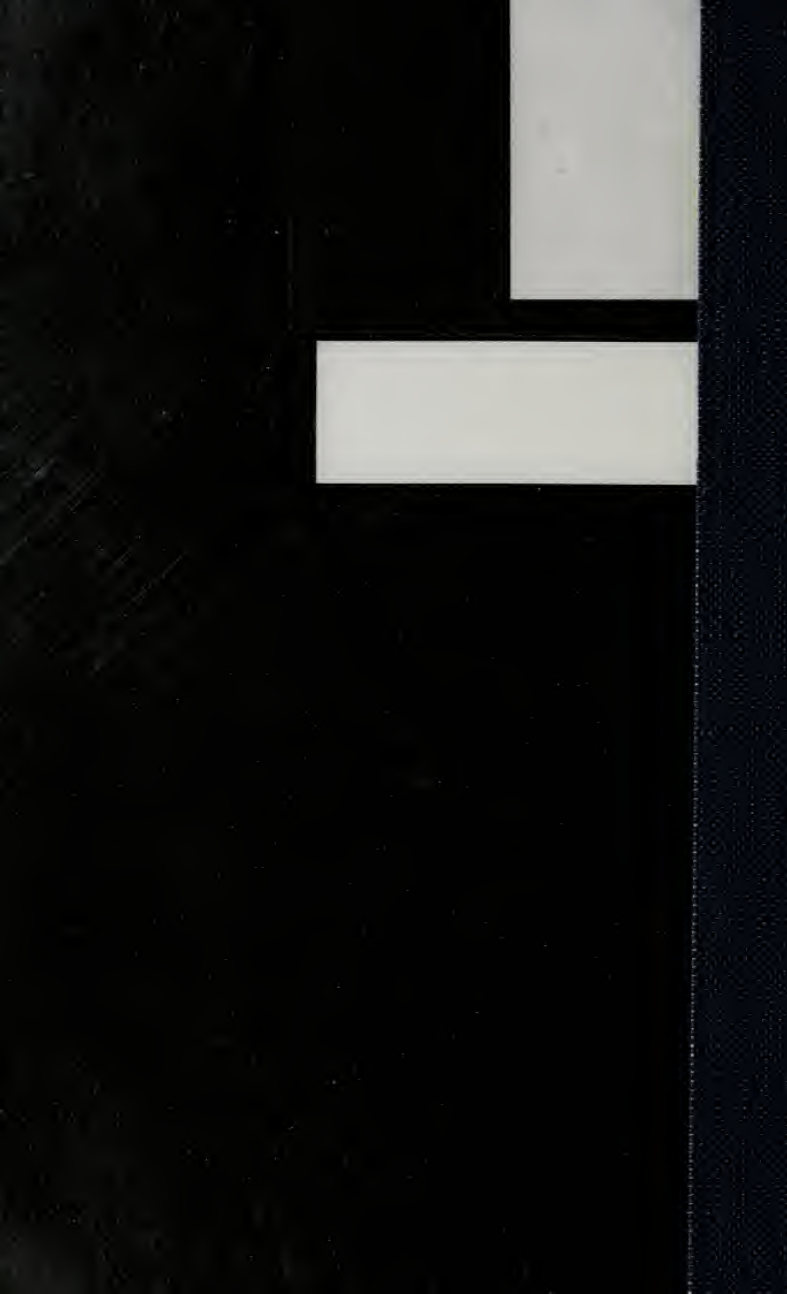
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Second Edition.

Hem Chandra Sarkar, M. A.



RAMMOHUN ROY, THE FATHER OF MODERN INDIA

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presented to Sree Maharajah of Kishapura
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RAJA RAMMOHUN ROY.

THE FATHER OF MODERN INDIA.

The history of India falls into three broad, clearly-marked divisions. There are the early days of exuberant vitality, creative vigour, many-sided progress, stretching far into the dim past—the India of the Rishis, of the Upanishads, of the Buddhist gospel of love and service, the India of the Epics and the schools of philosophy. We might denote the whole of this long period by the one comprehensive name of Ancient India. This was followed by a long era of gradual decline, of intellectual and spiritual stagnation, of moral and social degradation, of superstition and servitude—a veritable dark age which might be called Mediæval India. Since contact with the West awakened the country from this long death-like slumber, a fresh career of honour and distinction, of intellectual power and spiritual grandeur, of social regeneration and national progress has been ushered in. This new era has been significantly called the Rammohun Roy epoch; for he it was who heralded this era embodying as he did the purest and loftiest aspirations of New India in his own wonderful life and giving inspiring expression to them with his prophetic voice.

Rammohun Roy was truly an epoch-making man. No epoch in the history of any nation can be more fittingly named after a man than modern India after Raja Rammohun Roy ; and no man has a juster right to be called the prophet of an era than the Raja of the present epoch in India. Rammohun Roy was born at a momentous juncture in the history of India and was, under the providence of God, destined to mould the national life in all its bearings, as few have done in the history of the race. The political, social and religious life of New India has been permanently stamped with the personality of Rammohun Roy and his name will remain indissolubly associated with the history of modern India.

At the time of Rammohun Roy's birth a dense cloud of darkness was brooding over the country. For centuries together the muses of India had been silent. No voice of commanding genius relieved the silent monotony of this long period. The great masters of Sanskrit literature had long since disappeared, while the vernacular literature of none of the provinces had secured any eminence or recognition. The profound speculation of the Indian mind had become a thing of the past ; the schools of philosophy were extinct and in their place pedantic wrangling on trivial technicalities passed for profundity of thought and learning. The fountain of religious inspiration was not indeed quite dried up. The inmost spring of India's national life welled up again and again, but only to be lost in the surrounding wilderness. The fate of the great religious teachers and movements of this dark age

served only to bring into clearer view the evil days which had fallen on the land. Their message of spiritual religion was not understood and their followers soon degenerated into sects, intensifying the very evils which the Masters had striven to eradicate. The last of the prophets was Sri Chaitanya of Nadia, who flourished in the fifteenth century ; his gospel of love gradually sank into hollow sentimentalism in the hands of his unworthy followers.

With the decay of knowledge and the deadening of conscience, moral corruption and social degeneracy passed unchallenged in the country. Blind superstition and gross idolatry reigned supreme from one end to the other. Outward ceremonials, scrupulousness about eating and drinking, signs and symbols had usurped the place of living faith, cleanliness of heart and integrity of conduct. Personal purity in the male sex was not considered necessary at all. The sense of justice was dead. Men could marry any number of wives successively or even simultaneously ; but women, even little girls of five or six, if they happened to lose their husbands, whom perhaps they had never seen except at the hour of the so-called wedding, were not allowed to marry again, but were condemned to drag on a miserable existence deprived of all the comforts of life, and what was still more inhuman, burnt alive on the funeral pyre of their husbands. In some parts of the country female children were killed as soon as they were born : and the first born were not unoften thrown into the rivers in propitiation of the gods.

Politically, the country was passing through the

confusion of a transition period. The Mahommadan sovereignty had collapsed. The Mahrattas proved unequal to hold the falling sceptre. The sovereignty of the land was inevitably passing into the hands of the East India Company. By the time Rammohun Roy reached manhood, the chapter of this conquest was practically completed. But the British people had not yet fully assumed the duties and responsibilities of sovereignty. Their main concern was yet commerce and acquisition of wealth. The Mahommedan system of administration was allowed to continue with as little disturbance as possible. The new masters of the country were sorely apprehensive of losing their recently acquired territories by a sudden rising of the fanatical orientals. They seemed to have been mortally afraid of exciting the religious prejudices of the people. Successive Governors, though keenly aware of the inhuman cruelty of *Sati*, dared not interfere with it, lest the Company's rule should be in danger. Education was not yet considered to lie within the province of Government. There were no schools throughout the length and breadth of the country, except the *Tols* and *Maktabas* and *Pathshalas* where Sanskrit, Arabic, and Persian were taught with the elements of arithmetic.

Such was the condition of the country when Raja Rammohun Roy was born. We cannot explain his career and work by his environments. Rammohun Roy was undoubtedly not the product of his age. Rather, the age was largely his creation. Rammohan Roy had none of the benefits and facilities of education which

the young men of a generation or two later enjoyed, mainly through his labours. Politically, socially and educationally there was not yet any glimpse of light. The greatest glory of Rammohun Roy lay in this, that in the midst of thick, brooding darkness he saw afar the vision of a New India and bravely laboured against large odds, as will be seen in the following pages, to bring it nearer. Rammohun Roy seems to have early realised the mission of his life, and steadily prepared himself for it. Before he completed his sixteenth year the religious degradation of his country disclosed itself to him and he wrote against the current idol-worship with such force that it led to the expulsion of the boy of sixteen from his ancestral home. Rammohun Roy cheerfully accepted the ordeal and proceeded to utilise it in preparing himself for his life-work. The four years of exile were spent in the study of the religious systems of the past under the reputed guardians of the ancient lore and a personal survey of the condition of the country. In the course of his wanderings Rammohun Roy went up as far as Tibet to study Buddhism. Soon after his return home, he again proceeded to Benares and spent about twelve years in close and earnest study in that ancient seat of Hindu learning and orthodoxy, and it must have been here that the foundation was laid of his vast erudition in Sanskrit literature. Towards the latter half of this period he began to learn English; possibly his chief object in this was the investigation of the Christian scriptures, for, at this time he had no desire to enter Government service, it being only due to the pressing

request of Mr. Digby that he subsequently accepted a post under him. Even while in the service of Government he was steadily and diligently preparing himself for the main work;—he had all along contemplated an early retirement with a view to devote himself entirely to the great mission of his life, which he was enabled to do in 1814, when he settled in Calcutta with all his plans fully matured.

That work comprised the entire range of national aspirations and activities. Raja Rammohun Roy was not merely the founder of a religion : religion was, no doubt the main spring and the chief concern of his life, but his wonderful genius in its all-comprehensive reach embraced the whole national life and his breath of inspiration, and his consecrated labours succeeded in creating a New India—an India new all round. In 1814, when Raja Rammohun Roy came to settle in Calcutta the country was yet in deep slumber. By 1830, when he left our shores for England, the new life fairly set in, and the beginnings of these political, social and religious activities which have since spread over the whole country were clearly visible. During the short interval the Raja laid the foundations of the various movements which together make up a nation's life. Here was the fountain whence the streams of national life and activities issued and rapidly spread over the land. Let us briefly indicate the connection of Raja Rammohun Roy with the awakening of India at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

The great proximate cause of the national awakening was the introduction of English education. Raja

Rammohun Roy with his prophetic vision realised that, if India was to rise and take her legitimate place among modern nations, she must have modern scientific education after the model of the West. Accordingly, as soon as he was settled in Calcutta, he began to move for the introduction of English education. But in this, not only was he hampered by the indifference and prejudices of his own countrymen, but even many well-meaning Englishmen of high position were against him, as would be seen from the detailed narratives of his life. When Rammohun Roy started work in Calcutta, there were no public schools worth the name for the teaching of English anywhere in India. Ramkamal Sen, the author of the first English-Bengali dictionary, describes in his preface how the first English captain who sailed over to infant Calcutta, sent ashore asking for a *dobhashia* or interpreter. The Seths who acted as middlemen between the English merchants and the native weavers in the sale and purchase of piece goods, in their ignorance, sent a *dhobi* or washerman on board. To that washerman, who made a good use of the monopoly of the English that he acquired, Ramkamal Sen ascribes the honour of being the first English scholar amongst the people of Bengal. The mere vocabulary of nouns, adverbs and interjections which for nearly a century made up all the English of the Bengalis became enriched and improved when Sir Eliza Impey established the Supreme Court in Calcutta in 1774. The growing business of the court made the next generation of middle class Bengalees a little more familiar with

English. Interpreters, clerks, copyists and agents were in demand alike by the Government and the mercantile houses. Self-interest stimulated enterprising Bengali youths to learn English from European and Armenean adventurers. One, Sherbourne, a European, kept a school in Jorasanko quarter, where Dwarkanath Tagore learned the English alphabet. Martin Bowl in Amratola taught the founder of the wealthy Seal family. Aratoon Petroos was another who kept a school of fifty or sixty Bengalee lads. The best among the pupils became teachers in their turn, like the blind Nityananda Sen in Colootolah and the lame Udyacharan Sen, the tutor of the millionaire Mullicks. As remarked above, the Government had not yet undertaken the responsibility of public instruction. The year previous to the settlement of Raja Rammohun Roy in Calcutta, the Court of Directors, under the pressure of the Parliament, enjoined "that a sum of not less than a lakh of rupees, in each year, shall be set apart, and applied to the revival and improvement of literature and to the encouragement of the learned natives of India and for the introduction and promotion of knowledge of the sciences among the British territories of India." But it was not till many years afterwards that this sum was made available for the promotion of English education. In 1780 Warren Hastings had founded the Madrassa, a Mahommedan College in Calcutta for giving instruction to Mahommedan boys in Arabic and Persian. In 1791 Jonathan Duncan, Resident at Benares, did the same thing for the Hindus by establishing the Benares Sanskrit College

avowedly to cultivate "their laws, literature and religions." The Fort William College was established at Calcutta in 1800 for the benefit of the members of the civil service. But up to the arrival of Rammohun Roy in Calcutta there were no public schools for the systematic teaching of English to Indian boys.

No sooner had Rammohun Roy settled in Calcutta than he began to concert measures for the introduction of English education among his countrymen. It will be seen that all the three agencies that have been at work during the last hundred years, for the diffusion of education on western lines in India, viz., private bodies, Government institutions, and Christian missions, owed largely to his initiative in the beginning. The earliest public institution for the teaching of English in India was perhaps the Hindu College of Calcutta, established in 1819. It owed its origin to a discussion at the *Atmiya sabha* of Rammohun Roy in 1815. The story of the establishment of that memorable institution was told by the great missionary educationist, Dr. Alexander Duff, before the Select Committee of the House of Commons in 1853, and we cannot do better than reproduce it here. Dr. Duff said in his evidence :—

"The system of English education commenced in the following very simple way in Bengal. There were two persons who had to do with it,—one was Mr. David Hare, and the other was a native, Rammohun Roy. In the year 1815 they were in consultation one evening with a few friends as to what should be done

with a view to the elevation of the native mind and characters. Rammohun Roy's position was that they should establish an assembly or convocation, in which what are called the higher and purer dogmas of Vedanta or ancient Hinduism might be taught in short, —the Pantheism of the Vedas and their Upanishads but what Rammohun Roy delighted to call by the more genial title of Monotheism. Mr. David Hare was a watch-maker in Calcutta, an ordinary illiterate man himself ; but being a man of great energy and strong practical sense, he said the plan should be to institute an English School or College for the instruction of native youths Accordingly he soon drew up and issued a circular. on the subject, which gradually attracted the attention of the leading Europeans, and among others, of the Chief Justice Sir Hyde East. Being led to consider the proposed measure, he heartily entered into it, and got a meeting of European gentlemen assembled in May 1816. He invited also some of the influential natives to attend. Then it was unanimously agreed that they should commence an institution for the teaching of English to the children of higher classes, to be designated the Hindu College of Calcutta."

Rammohun Roy threw himself into the project with characteristic energy but, with a rare self-effacement voluntarily withdrew from the committee, as some of the orthodox Hindu leaders on account of his religious views, objected to be his colleagues on it, which, however, did not affect his zealous exertions in its behalf from outside.

The share of Raja Rammohun Roy in inducing the

Government to interest itself in the introduction of English education in India is well-known. We have already mentioned that in 1813 the Director of the East India Company decided to set apart a lakh of rupees from the revenues of the country for educational purposes. When the question of the utilisation of this amount came up for discussion, there arose a difference of opinion among the high officials, including the members of the Council of the Governor-General. One party wished to devote the Government grant to give stipends to Pandits and Moulvis, and scholarships to Arabic and Sanskrit students, and to publish oriental manuscripts for the revival of classical learning, and were called the Orientalists. The other party were for establishing schools and colleges on the model of English public schools for the spread of western scientific and literary education and were called the Anglicists. The battle raged for several years, till it was finally settled by the memorable decree of Lord Bentinck's Council of the 7th March 1835. Rammohun Roy had a large share in bringing about this momentous decision. At first the Orientalists were in the ascendant and succeeded in securing the Government grant for their purpose. In 1823 Raja Rammohun Roy addressed to Lord Amherst, then Governor-General, a long letter which would alone immortalise his name. In it he advocated by unanswerable arguments the introduction of western education after the English model. The story has been told in full detail by Miss Collet. All we need point out here is that, but for Rammohun Roy's seasonable intervention, the intro-

duction of English education in India might have been indefinitely, at least for a long time, postponed. Though no immediate satisfactory reply was given to his letter, the success of the cause of the Anglicists now become assured ; for when Rammohun Roy wrote on behalf of the dumb millions of India, demanding modern scientific education, it was felt that the ultimate triumph of the plea could not be far off.

Equally prominent was the part Raja Rammohun took in drawing the Christian mission into the field of Indian education. As soon as Rammohun Roy became acquainted with the several Christian denominations of Europe and America, he began to interest them in the problem of Indian education. He lost no opportunity of pressing upon them the importance and advantages of imparting modern scientific education to the people of India. We find him repeatedly writing to Unitarian leaders of his acquaintance in England and America "to send as many serious and able teachers of European learning and science and Christian morality unmingled with religious doctrines as your circumstances may admit, to spread knowledge gratuitously among the native community." The Unitarians were not able to render the aid desired, but a similar request at another quarter bore excellent fruits. Rev. James Bryce, the first Scottish Chaplain in Calcutta, was persuaded by Raja Rammohun Roy to write to the home authorities to send missionaries for the spread of knowledge and learning. Let us tell the story in the words of Dr. George Smith, the biographer of Dr. Duff. He writes : "It was Rammohun Roy too,

who was the instrument of the conversion of the first chaplain. Dr. Bryce, from the opinion of the Abbe Dubois that no Hindu could be made a true Christian to the conviction that the past want of success was largely owing to the inaptitude of the means employed. Encouraged by the approbation of Rammohun Roy, Dr. Bryce presented to the General Assembly of 1824 the petition and memorial which first directed the attention of the Church of Scotland to British India as a field for missionary exertions." Rammohun Roy, as an attendant of the St. Andrews Kirk, supported this memorial, in a separate communication. It was in response to this appeal that the Rev. Alexander Duff the pioneer of Educational Missions in India, was sent over by the Church of Scotland in 1830.

Rev. Alexander Duff arrived in Calcutta in 1830. The young missionary received a most cordial welcome and valuable help from Raja Rammohun Roy, but for whose timely co-operation he might have had to go back in disappointment. Let us again quote from the biographer of Dr. Duff: "In a pleasant garden-house in the leafy suburbs of Calcutta, Raja Rammohun Roy, then fifty-six years of age, was spending his declining days in earnest meditation of divine truth, broken only by works of practical benevolence among his countrymen, and soon by preparations for that visit to England, where in 1833, he yielded to the uncongenial climate. 'You must at once visit the Raja', said General Beatson, when Mr. Duff presented his letter of introduction, 'and I will drive you out on an early evening'. Save by Duff himself afterwards, justice has never been

done to this Hindu reformer, this Erasmus of India." So the two remarkable men met, the far-sighted Indian listened to the young Scotchman's statement of his objects and plans and expressed general approval. Continues the biographer of Dr. Duff :—

"Greatly cheered by the emphatic concurrence of Rammohun Roy, Mr. Duff said the real difficulty now was, where or how, to get a hall in the native city ; for the natives owing to caste prejudices, were absolutely averse to letting any of their house to a European for European purpose. Then if a suitable place could be got, how could youths of the respectable classes be induced, since he was resolved to teach the Bible in every class, and he was told this would constitute an insuperable objection. Rammohun Roy at once offered the small hall of the Brahmo Sabha in the Chitpore Road, for which he had been paying to the five Brahmin owners £5 a month of rental.....Driving at once to the spot, the generous Hindu reformer secured the Hall for the Christian missionary from Scotland at £4 a month. Pointing to a punkhah suspended from the roof, Rammohun Roy said with a smile, 'I leave you that as my legacy'.

"After a few days five bright-eyed youths of the higher class, mostly Brahmanical, called upon Mr. Duff at Dr. Brown's where he still resided, with a note of introduction from Rammohan Roy stating that those five, with the full consent of their friends, were ready to attend him whenever he might open the school."

But the troubles did not end here. On the day of the opening of the School, 13th July 1830, as Dr. Duff

put a copy of the Bible into the hands of each of the boys, there was murmuring among them, which found voice in the protest of a leader. "This is the Christian *Shastra*. We are not Christians; how then can we read it? It may make us Christians, and our friends will drive us out of caste." Rammohun Roy had thoughtfully anticipated the crisis. And now he presented himself on the occasion. He gently persuaded the boys that there was no harm in reading the Christian *Shastra*. Christians like Dr. Horace Hayman Wilson had read the Hindu *Shastras* but they had not become Hindus. He himself had read the Koran but that had not made him a Mussalman. So the remonstrants were satisfied for the time. Day after day for a month Rammohun Roy would visit the school and frequently thereafter, till he left for England. That small school was the pioneer of the splendid Missionary educational institutions which have done so much for the diffusion of education in India.

Rammohun Roy did not rest satisfied with helping others with his counsel and influence. With that entire devotion to purpose and thoroughness in execution which characterised all his efforts, Rammohun at a considerable expense established a school, called the Anglo-Hindu School, for imparting free education in English to Hindu boys. Two teachers were employed, one on a salary of Rs. 150 and the other of Rs. 70 a month. Nearly the whole of the cost was met by the Raja from his own not superabundant resources. The school flourished for several years and did much good. Maharshi Devendranath Tagore received his early

education in this school. One of its special features was the imparting of religious and moral instruction along with secular education, a course on which Rammohun Roy laid great emphasis.

Another great service which Raja Rammohun Roy rendered to the cause of education was the creation of Bengali prose literature. Though primarily affecting Bengal, it has indirectly exercised a highly beneficial influence over the whole country. The intellectual progress of a nation must ultimately depend upon the development of her mother-tongue. During the last hundred years there has been a vast and widespread progress in the vernaculars of the country. In Bengal, in this matter as in many others, Raja Rammohun Roy was the pioneer. At the time of his birth Bengali literature did not count for anything. There had been some poets, whose extant writings are of considerable poetical merit; but of prose, which is after all the currency of a nation's intellectual life, there was none. There were no religious, philosophical, historical or literary books or essays in Bengali prose. Rammohun Roy was the first to employ Bengali prose in expressing serious thought and making it a powerful medium of popular enlightenment and education. He translated Sanskrit scriptures, conducted religious controversies, wrote articles on moral and social subjects in simple, elegant Bengali prose. He even wrote text books on grammar, geometry, geography and other useful subjects in Bengali. He was also the father of that branch of literature which has become so common and so potent a factor

of modern civilisation, viz, journalism, in Bengali. As early as 1819 he started a Bengali journal called the *Samvad Kaumudi*, which was perhaps the first Bengali journal, and was largely instrumental in bringing about the transformation of thought and life in the province. Thus arose a new Bengali literature, which has steadily grown in volume and power ever since.

Equally important was the Raja's contributions to the revival of Sanskrit study in Bengal. In his time Sanskrit was at a very low ebb in the province. Sanskrit learning was mainly confined to a mechanical cramming in grammar and the *Smritis*. The Vedas, the Upanishads, and the Vedant were almost forgotten. Though an earnest advocate of modern scientific culture, Rammohun Roy was no less ardent in his admiration for and insistence on the revival of the ancient Aryan culture. At the discussions of the *Atmiya sabha* as to the best means for the elevation of the Indian people, at which David Hare was present, Rammohun Roy seriously contended at first that "they should establish an assembly or convocation in which what are called the higher or purer dogmas of Vedantism or ancient Hinduism might be taught." Later when he came to stand in favour of western scientific education, he did not altogether abandon his plea for the revival of ancient Hindu learning, but persevered single-handed in his scheme and at last in 1826 succeeded in establishing a Vedanta college. He appears to have built a house and spent every month a considerable sum of money for it.

To convince people of the excellence of the ancient Hindu religious literature, he further published some of the masterpieces of the early times with translations in Bengali, English and Hindi. This had, of course, the desired effect; others, following in his footsteps, laboured in this rich field; and there has grown a lively interest in the study of ancient Hindu religious literature of which Rammohun was the inaugurator. Eminent scholars of the present day have borne testimony to the value of this phase of the Raja's labours. Pandit Kalibar Vedantabagish, a well-known Vedantic scholar of recent times, observed at a public meeting in commemoration of the 63rd anniversary of the Raja's death that "a great boon had been conferred on the country by Raja Rammohun Roy in reviving the study of Vedanta philosophy in Bengal and acknowledged in feeling terms how he was himself indebted to the Raja for having been first led to the study of Vedanta by the Raja's writings on the subject in the *Tattwabodhini Patrika*."

The inestimable blessings which Rammohun Roy conferred on his countrymen by establishing the Brahmo Samaj have somewhat overshadowed the greatness of his services in other spheres. Not only was Raja Rammohun Roy the inaugurator of a new era in the religious history of India, he was equally the Father of the modern political awakening of the country. At the celebration of the death anniversary of the Raja on 27th September, 1904, the Hon'ble Babu Surendranath Banerjee said in the course of his speech, "Let it be remembered that Rammohun was not only the Founder

of the Brahmo Samaj and the pioneer of all social reform in Bengal, but he was also the Father of constitutional agitation in India." Before the time of Rammohun Roy's public activities in Calcutta, there was no glimmering of a political life in the country. People had no conception of their civil rights and privileges; nobody ever thought of approaching Government to make known their grievances and ask for redress. Raja Rammohun Roy was the first to enunciate the rights and privileges of the people, and in the name of the nation to speak to the Government of their duties and responsibilities as the sovereign power. The first stand made by the people of India in defence of their civil rights was when Raja Rammohun Roy in his own name and in the name of five of his friends, submitted a memorial to the Supreme Court in Calcutta, on the 31st March, 1823 against the Ordinance of the then acting Governor-General, Mr. Adam, prescribing that thenceforth no one should publish a newspaper or other periodicals without having obtained a licence from the Governor-General in Council." The conception as well as the execution of the memorial, was Rammohun Roy's own. Miss Collect has justly said of the memorial, "it may be regarded as the Areopagitica of Indian history. Alike in diction and in argument, it forms a noble landmark in the progress of English culture in the East."

Whether for cogent reasoning or for convincing appeal the memorial could hardly be excelled. It would do credit to any statesman of any age. With a broad, liberal, farsighted statesmanship it enumerates

the inestimable blessings of a free press both for the rulers and the ruled. "After this Rule and Ordinance shall have been carried into execution, your memorialists are therefore sorry to observe, that a complete stop will be put to the diffusion of knowledge and the consequent mental improvement now going on, either by translations into the popular dialect of this country from the learned languages of the East, or by the circulation of literary intelligence drawn from foreign publications. And the same cause will also prevent those natives who are better versed in the laws and customs of the British Nation from communicating to their fellow subjects a knowledge of the admirable system of Government established by the British and the peculiar excellencies of the means they have adopted for the strict and impartial administration of justice. Another evil of equal importance in the eyes of a just Ruler is that it will also preclude the natives from making the Government readily acquainted with the errors and injustice that may be committed by its executive officers in the various parts of this extensive country ; and it will also preclude the natives from communicating frankly and honestly, to their Gracious Sovereign in England and his Council, the real condition of His Majesty's faithful subjects in this distant part of his dominions and the treatment they experience from the local Government ; since such information cannot in future be conveyed to England, as it has been, either by the translations from the native publications inserted in the English newspapers printed here and sent to Europe or by the

English publications which the natives themselves had in contemplation to establish, before this Rule and Ordinance was proposed. After this sudden deprivation of one of the most precious of their rights which has been freely allowed them, since the establishment of the British power, a right which they are not, cannot be, charged with having ever abused, the inhabitants of Calcutta would be no longer justified in boasting, that they are fortunately placed by Providence under the protection of the whole British nation or that the King of England and his Lords and Commons are their Legislators, and that they are secured in the enjoyment of the same civil and religious privileges that every Briton is entitled to in England."

When this memorial was rejected by the Supreme Court, the Raja prepared a fresh memorial to be submitted to the King. Miss Collet has characterised this latter as "one of the noblest pieces of English to which Rammohun put his hand. Its stately periods and not less stately thought recall the eloquence of the great orators of a century ago. In a language and style for ever associated with the glorious vindication of liberty, it invokes against arbitrary exercise of British power the principles and the traditions which are distinctive of British history." It was really a marvellous production, considering the age and the circumstances under which it was written. But it had produced no better results than its predecessor. The Privy Council in November, 1825, after six months' consideration declined to comply with the petition. As a final protest, Rammohun Roy stopped his weekly

Urdu paper, *Mirat-ul-Akhbar*, declaring his inability to publish it under what he considered degrading conditions.

In 1827 Rammohun Roy made another spirited protest against the illiberal policy of the Government, which reveals his ever-wakeful solicitude for the rights of his countrymen as well as his deep political insight. In 1826 a Jury Bill for India was passed, which came into operation in the beginning of 1827. Rammohun Roy prepared and sent up to both Houses of Parliament petitions against it signed by Hindus and Mahommedans. On this occasion the Raja took his stand on the injustice and injudiciousness of making invidious religious distinctions in the administration of a country like India. The circumstances of the case will be clearly understood from the following concise statement in a letter written by Rammohun Roy on the 15th August, 1828 to Mr. J. Crawford : "In his famous Jury Bill, Mr. Wynn, the late President of the Board of Control, has by introducing religious distinctions into the judicial system of this country, not only afforded just grounds for dissatisfaction among the Natives in general, but has excited much alarm in the breast of everyone conversant with political principles. Any natives either Hindu or Mahommedan, are rendered by this Bill subject to judicial trial by Christians, either European or Native, while Christians including Native converts, are exempted from the degradation of being tried either by a Hindn or Mussalman juror, however high he may stand in the estimation of society. This Bill also denies both to Hindus and Mussalmans the

honour of a seat in the Grand Jury, even in the trial of fellow Hindus or Mussalmans. This is the sum total of Mr. Wynn's late Jury Bill of which we bitterly complain." Rammohun Roy supported his contention by referring to the miseries of Ireland arising out of civil discriminations between different religious beliefs. With reference to this letter, the biographer of the Raja remarks: "There is here in germ the national aspiration which is now breaking forth into cries for representation of India in the Imperial Parliament, 'Home Rule for India' and even 'India for the Indians.' The prospect of an educated India, of an India approximating to European standards of culture, seems to have never been long absent from Rammohun's mind, and he did, however vaguely, claim in advance for his countrymen the political rights which progress in civilisation inevitably involves. Here again Rammohun stands forth as the tribune and prophet of New India."

Indeed, the thoroughness and vigour of the Raja's political efforts were astonishing. Even at that early age he carried his political agitations to the very centre of the seat of authority. His visit to England, fraught as it was with manifold consequences, had a far-reaching effect on the politics of India. One of the main objects which he had in view in going to England was to lay before the British public the cause of India, and in this mission, he was remarkably successful. "Rammohun Roy's presence in this country," says the English biographer of the Raja, "made the English people aware, as they had never been before,

of the dignity, the culture and the piety of the race they had conquered in the East. India became incarnate in him, and dwelt among us, and we beheld her glory. In the court of the King, in the halls of the Legislature, in the select coteries of fashion, in the society of philosophers and men of letters, in Anglican church and Non-conformist meeting-house, in the privacy of many a home, and before the wondering crowds of Lancashire operatives, Rammohan Roy stood forth the visible and personal embodiment of our Eastern Empire. Wherever he went, there went a stately refutation of the Anglo-Indian insolence which saw in an Indian fellow subject only a 'black man' or a 'nigger'. As he had interpreted England to India, so now he interpreted India to England. But it was not merely by his silent presence and personality in England that he advanced the cause of India; but during his three years' stay in that country he worked strenuously and incessantly on her behalf.* He lost no opportunity of pressing the claims of India on those who were responsible for her good government. He went to England at a very opportune time. The Charter of the East India Company was to be shortly

* Miss Carpenter writes that during the residence of Rammohun Roy in England "his time and thoughts were continually occupied with the proceedings of the Government, and affording information and advice whenever they were required. Everything else was made subservient to this great object. Frequently was the noble form of the illustrious stranger seen within the precincts of our Houses of Parliament, as those still remember who were there thirty-five years ago.

renewed. Rammohun Roy had purposely chosen this time for his European visit that he might influence the authorities in inserting, in the new Charter provisions for the better administration of his country. His hopes were amply realised. He was asked to give his evidence before the Select Committee of the House of Commons appointed in February and reappointed in June 1831 to consider the renewal of the Company's Charter, and he submitted his evidence in writing. His two papers on the Judicial and the Revenue systems of India, which appeared in the blue books and were subsequently reprinted by him, are masterpieces of political information and insight, and might be read with profit even at this day, while they must have largely influenced the decision of the authorities in his time. One cannot but be struck with the accuracy and exhaustiveness of the information and the soundness and breadth of the views of the writer. Among the principal measures he advocated, were the substitution of English for Persian as the official language of the courts of law, the appointment of native assessors in the civil courts, trial by Jury, separation of the offices of Judge and Revenue Commissioner, of those of Judge and Magistrate, codification of the criminal law and also of the civil law in India, large employment of Indians in the civil service of the country and consultation of public opinion before enacting legislation. It is remarkable that, though himself a Zamindar, Rammohun Roy earnestly pleaded the cause of the agricultural peasants as against the Zamindars. He showed that, though the Zamindars

had greatly benefitted by the Permanent Settlement of 1793, the condition of the actual cultivators continued as miserable as ever, the Zamindars being at liberty to enhance the rent constantly. "Such is the melancholy condition of agricultural labourers," he wrote, "that it always gives me the greatest pain to allude to it." The remedy he asked for was, in the first place, the prohibition of any further rise in rent and, in the second, a reduction in the revenue demanded from the Zamindar so as to ensure a reduction in rent. Thus Rammohun was the champion of the people at large and not of the class to which he himself belonged. Many of the reforms advocated by him have already been carried out, and the political leaders of the present day are still working out the programme laid down by him. Babu Surendranath Banerjee thus acknowledges in the address already referred to the political foresight of the Raja : "It is remarkable how he anticipated us in some of the great political problems of to-day."

To turn next to the social work of Raja Rammohun Roy, the great reform with which his name will remain associated for ever is the abolition of *Sati*. But for his timely co-operation it is doubtful if the British Government could have suppressed this flagrant evil; it would certainly have continued for a much longer time. This inhuman custom had prevailed in India for many centuries and a few fitful efforts under the Hindu and Mahomedan rule to abolish it had ended in failure. At the time when Rammohun Roy turned his attention to this shameful wrong it was, if anything,

steadily on the increase. Though individual kind-hearted officers looked upon the custom with abhorrence, the attitude of the Government itself was that of *laissez faire*; successive Governors declined to interfere with it for fear of wounding the religious susceptibilities of the people, which might lead to trouble. It was the efforts of Raja Rammohun Roy that made possible the drastic measures so promptly taken. Though there had been some talk and correspondence among the official circles as to their duty, it is evident that, but for the appearance of the great reformer on the scene, no decisive steps would have been taken at least for a long time. Rammohun Roy, by incessant agitation prepared the public mind on the one side and strengthened the hands of the Government on the other. By means of his writings and discussions he created a powerful public opinion in favour of the abolition of the cruel custom. He showed conclusively that the Hindu *Shashtras* did not enjoin the burning of widows along with their husbands, and thus disarmed the objection of interference with the religious rites of the people. He removed all obstacles real or interposed on the way of Government action. But even the Government hesitated for a considerable time, and Rammohun Roy had to appeal to them in the name of humanity with all the earnestness of his nature, before they could be persuaded to take the momentous step. Rev. W. J. Fox justly remarked in welcoming the Raja on his arrival in London:—"There is no doubt that it was greatly through his firmness, his enlightened reasonings and his persevering efforts, that the Government of Bengal

at last thought themselves enabled to interdict the immolation of widows. His arguments and his appeals to ancient authorities held sacred by the Brahmins, enlightened the minds of many of them; and made the merciful interposition of Lord William Bentinck and his Council, no longer regarded by them, and by persons connected with the East India Company at home, as an interference with the religion of the Hindus." It was a great triumph of reason and humanity. A cruel wrong, a barbarous and inhuman atrocity, was blotted out from the face of the Hindu society. The yearly toll of many hundreds of noble, unselfish lives was stopped for ever. But more important than the immediate and visible good that resulted, a great principle was enunciated, a new era in the hoary Hindu society was inaugurated. The abolition of *Sati* marked the secure foundation of the social reform movement in India. For centuries past the Hindu society had been at the mercy of blind tradition and heartless custom. Cruel wrongs, gross injustices, disgraceful superstitions had passed unchallenged from generation to generation. Rammohun Roy dared, for the first time after the lapse of many centuries, to challenge the unquestioned authority of custom and tradition. He enunciated and upheld the dictates of reason, conscience and humanity against prejudice and public opinion and appealed to the intelligent authority of the *shastras* against the blind, slavish submission to tradition, born of ignorance which passed for piety. Rammohun Roy taught the people to realise that everything that had come down from

the past was not ideal and that a living society stood in constant need of readjustment to varying circumstances. Thus a new era of conscious, active reform was inaugurated in the Hindu society, of which Raja Rammohun was the leader and pioneer.

It is noteworthy that in his efforts for social reform Raja Rammohun Roy made use of all the three different methods the claims of which have often been placed in mutual antagonism in later times. He utilised every available aid from the *Shastras*; but he had faith as well in the reason, conscience and common sense of men, and always appealed to the humanity and moral sense of the people. His controversial writings, appealing by turns to common sense, conscience and the authority of the *Shastras*, are admirably suited to the purpose of carrying conviction. He also did not hesitate to seek the aid of Government, where necessary and possible, to further his scheme for the improvement of social efficiency. Thus not only was he the pioneer of the social reform movement in modern India, but he also laid down the lines along which the work should be carried on.

Rammohun Roy did not rest satisfied with the mere preaching of reformed principles, but boldly proceeded to carry them out in his own life and conduct. His daring visit to Europe was an example of heroic courage and practical reform. He was the first Hindu to cross the ocean. It was really the breaking of a spell, as it has been said, "which for ages the sea had laid on India." We can understand the daring intrepidity of the act from the fact that even after Rammohun Roy had

furnished an example, it was but rarely followed for many subsequent years and even now, there are hundreds who, even after receiving the highest education are still afraid of doing what Rammohun Roy did nearly a century ago. For India it was truly a momentous step—an act of liberation. The English biographer of the Raja does not in the least overestimate the significance of this great enterprise in saying that “the consequences for his countrymen are such as to make this act alone sufficient to secure for its author a lasting distinction.”

During the few crowded years of his public life the Raja set his hand to several items of the social reform programme of the present day. He denounced in scathing terms the many injustices and ill-treatments which women were subjected to in the Hindu society of his day. He deplored the ignorance and the lack of education of women, while indignantly repudiating the insinuations against the intellectual and moral capacities of the gentler sex. He firmly believed that with “proper education and facilities for improvements, women would prove in no way inferior to men.” His chivalrous regard for women made him keenly sensitive to their wrongs and miseries. He wrote strongly against polygamy. He pointed out how the Hindu *Shastras* did not permit more than one marriage except under certain specified conditions. It is even said that he advocated the passing of a State Regulation to require a man before marrying a second time to obtain a license from a Magistrate or some other authorised Government officer certifying to such a defect in the

existing wife as alone according to the *Shastras* justified a second marriage. The miseries of Hindu widows did not fail to attract the sympathy of his tender heart; but he had no time to do much for them. In an early issue of the *Samvad Kaumudi* (No. 6 of 1821) we find a proposal to raise a fund in aid of helpless Hindu widows. After his departure for England there was a wide-spread rumour that on his return, he would introduce the remarriage of Hindu widows.

Rammohun Roy was opposed to the existing system of caste distinctions in Hindu society. He held that the superiority or inferiority of men depended on their own respective merits and not on the accident of birth. He alone was a Brahmin who knew and was devoted to Brahman. With a view to propagating this spiritual principle of sociology, the Raja began the publication of a Sanskrit treatise by Mrityunjaya Bhattacharya, against the caste system, together with a translation and annotations in Bengali by himself. This work, however, was not completed, only the first chapter being published in 1829. He was keenly alive to the evils of the caste system. Writing to a friend in 1828, he observed: "The distinction of castes introducing innumerable divisions and subdivisions among them has entirely deprived them of patriotic feeling, and the multitude of religious rites and ceremonies and the laws of purification have totally disqualified them from undertaking any difficult enterprise."

Thus it will be noticed that Rammohun Roy's scheme of social reform was exhaustive and thorough-going, though with his unfailing, practical wisdom he concen-

trated his attention on the more urgent problems then before him. With the passion of the reformer for justice and humanity he combined the practical wisdom of the statesman, which made him the most successful reformer of modern India.

But the greatest work of Rammohun Roy was undoubtedly in the field of religion. Here he stands forth not only as a reformer of Hinduism but as the bearer of a message and mission for all humanity. The cardinal principle of his religious faith was—One God, Father of all, and spiritual worship. Early in life there dawned on his mind the light of a universal religion which knew no distinction of race or colour, country or nationality, as a bar to men of all types and traditions standing on the basis of their common humanity and worshipping their common Father in spirit and in truth. This early faith, after the tests and trials of his entire, eventful career, after searching criticism at the hands of numerous adversaries from various standpoints and after mature deliberation on his own part, found expression in the memorable trust deed of the Brahmo Samaj, the place of worship which he established for the exercise of universal spiritual religion. It was dedicated to the “worship and adoration of the Eternal, Unsearchable and Immutable Being, who is the Author and Preserver of the Universe, but not under, or by any other name, designation or title, peculiarly used for and applied to, any particular being or beings, by any man or set of men whatsoever, and that no graven image, statue or sculpture, carving, painting, picture, portrait or like-

ness of any thing shall be admitted within the messuage building, land, tenements, hereditaments and premises ; and that no sacrifice, offering or oblation of any kind or thing shall ever be permitted therein." The Trust-deed directed that the place should be available as a place of "public meeting of all sorts and descriptions of people, without distinction, as shall behave and conduct themselves in an orderly, sober, religious and devout manner." Thus he stands forth as one of the earliest exponents, if not the very earliest, of the modern liberal religious movement, which recognises the working of the spirit of God in all religions and finds His revelation in the scriptures of all races. While the religious world was yet sharply divided between the Hindu and the Mlechha, the Christian and the Heathen, the Moslem and the Kafir, while even the advanced religious thinkers of the west, with all the advantages of rapidly expanding scientific knowledge and culture, were still unable to rise above sectarian narrowness and the inheritance of tribal, ethnic or national conceptions of God and religion, this wonderful Indian, without any opportunities for culture, any enlightened public sentiment for support, realised a conception of universal religion, which transcended all barriers of clime and colour, creed and custom. The religious thinkers of Europe and America were still busy with the problems of verbal inspiration, validity of miracles and such other questions ; their vision did not yet stretch beyond the confines of the Bible and Christendom. But on Rammohun Roy there already dawned so early the full-orbed glory of one God, one

humanity and one ever-progressive revelation. Before the first quarter of the nineteenth century was over, we find him speaking with profound veneration of the Vedanta and the Bible and the Quoran. It is no wonder that his contemporaries failed to understand him, and that even to this day the Hindus claim him to have been a Hindu, the Christians a Christian, and the Mahommedans a *Zabardust Moulvi*. Even an enlightened and open-minded disciple and co-worker like the Rev. Mr. Adam was puzzled over the enigma of this great mind. It is interesting and amusing to find Mr. Adam, towards the close of his association with Rammohun Roy, making the following confession to a common friend, Dr. Tuckerman: "Rammohun Roy, I am persuaded, supports this institution, not because he believes in the divine authority of the Ved, but solely as an instrument for overthrowing idolatry. To be candid, however, I must add that the conviction has lately gained ground in my mind that he employs Unitarian Christianity, in the same way, as an instrument for spreading pure and just notions of God, without believing in the divine authority of the Gospel."

The facts were as stated by Mr. Adam only the insinuation contained in the passage is groundless. There was no inconsistency or unworthy policy in the position of Rammohun Roy. His catholic mind rose to a height where the narrow limits of sectarianism ceased to exist for him. He was accordingly described by Mr. Adam in a letter to another friend as "both a Christian and a Hindu"—a description which

Rammohun Roy himself approved of as a true picture of his religious attitude. The truth is, as his English biographer says of him in another connection, that the "Raja was no merely occidentalized oriental, no Hindu polished into the doubtful semblance of a European, just as little was he, if we may use the term without offence, a spiritual Eurasian. If we follow the right line of his development we shall find that he leads the way from the Orientalism of past, not to, but through Western culture, towards a civilization which is neither Western nor Eastern, but something vastly larger and nobler than both." Similarly, it might be said of him that he was neither entirely a Hindu nor exclusively a Christian but something larger and nobler than both. He led the way from the Hinduism of the past, not to, but through Christianity, into the Universal Church of spiritual Theism, which embraced all that was precious and inspiring in Hinduism as well as in Christianity. His religious position was, we believe, correctly and very aptly summed up in the words of the memorial tablet over his tomb at Bristol, "a conscientious and steadfast believer in unity of the Godhead who consecrated his life with entire devotion to the worship of the Divine Spirit alone." It was not a mere philosophical opinion, but a living faith, which he hoped and believed was to be the religion of humanity. It was not even eclecticism, stringing together passages and sayings from different scriptures, but in his own soul Rammohun Roy saw the vision of a living faith, which, with his growing acquaintance with the religious literature of the world, he found

hidden in all religions under the crust of ages. He realised that true Hinduism as much as true Christianity or true Mahommedanism, was not far away from his own inmost faith. It was this liberalism of fellowship that the followers of sectarian religions naturally misjudged in him, but that really led him not to object to being called a Hindu or a Christian. He saw with the prophet's eye that a time would come when the boundaries of creed and scripture and prophet would merge, if not melt away, and men of all races, the east and west, north and south, would sit together in adoration at the feet of "the Eternal, Unsearchable and Immutable God." The foundation of this liberal universal religion, and catholic worship, fitly marked the crowning act of his eventful life. He was hardly understood at the time, even by his followers. But to-day the ideal of Rammohun Roy has spread and is making rapid progress throughout the civilised world. Churches and sects are unmistakably moving towards the position which Rammohun Roy occupied in solitary grandeur a century ago.

To India his mission has proved to be of the most far-reaching consequences. It has laid the axe at the root of the evil growth of centuries. With the unerring precision of the prophet under the sure guidance of a divine dispensation, Rammohun Roy laid the foundation of a living spiritual faith and formed the nucleus of a progressive Catholic Church, which, in the face of almost insurmountable difficulties, has spread to every part of this vast land and made its way among almost all the races and communities that comprise

its immense population. The Brahmo Samaj, which is the concrete embodiment of his religious and social ideal, has thoroughly discarded idol worship, and the fetters of caste and priestcraft, the bondage of infallible *guru* and book, which for centuries domineered oppressively over the spirit of the nation and defied successfully all endeavours at reformation. In a country divided and sub-divided into innumerable castes and sub-castes, sects and sub-sects and among whom there was not the commonest amenities of fellowship, it has already united men of all castes and creeds language and nationalities,—Hindus, Mahommedans and Christians, Bengalis, Mahrattas, Parsees and Telugus, Indians and Europeans into a close spiritual and social brotherhood.

It has given to the world a pure, spiritual religion not fettered by a narrow creed or confession, not confined in blind, exclusive allegiance to one particular book or prophet, but free and progressive, wedded to truth and righteousness from whatsoever source they come, owning the scriptures and prophets of all ages and countries as its own so far as they prove helpful and stimulating to the higher life.

It has brought a message of deliverance to the submerged millions of India and extended equal intellectual and spiritual fellowship to womankind, who for ages have been cut off from light and culture and doomed to a narrow, ignoble life under many cruel wrongs and injustices. While the Brahmo Samaj has thus formed an advanced community with a lofty domestic and social ideal, numerically not yet very

large, it has also profoundly affected the mass of the people, who are being rapidly leavened with the new ideals. Rammohun's spiritual influence is not confined to the Brahmo Samaj alone ; he is verily the spiritual Father, the *Guru* of New India.

Leaving alone the work, if we look at the man, we find all testimonies agree in giving the impression of a personality of extraordinary influence. In whatever society he moved he evoked warm and enthusiastic admiration. Mr. Adam, with his several years' intimate knowledge of him wrote : "I was never more thoroughly, deeply and constantly impressed than when in the presence of Rammohun Roy and in friendly and confidential converse with him, that I was in the presence of a man of natural and inherent genius, of powerful understanding and of a determined will, a will determined with singular energy and uncontrollable self-direction, lofty and generous purposes." The Rev. W. J. Fox, after an association with the Raja for only two years, said of him in the course of a memorial sermon after his death : "We shall see his face no more ! His presence has passed away as a poetic image fades from the brain ! But it has left impressions which will long endure ; influences of good, wide and deep here, yet wider and deeper in the distant land of his nativity. And being dead, he yet speaketh with a voice to which not only India but Europe and America will listen for generations." An English correspondent of Dr. Channing, Miss Lucy Aikin, who came in frequent contact with the Raja, wrote of him to the American religious reformer : "He is indeed a

glorious being,—a true sage, as it appears, with the genuine humility of the character, and with more fervour, more sensibility, a more engaging tenderness of heart than any *class* of character can justly claim." An American physician of London, Dr. Boot, wrote of the Raja in a letter * to Mr. Estlin: "To me he stood alone in the

* The letter is so interesting that it is worth reproduction in its entirety. It is as follows:—

24, Gower Street, Bedford Square,
27th November, 1833.

My dear Sir,—Your kind, most kind, letter of yesterday, has this moment reached me, and I have shed tears over it, at the fresh recollection of the sorrow that has thrown a deep shadow over the future hopes and happiness of my life. I feel most sincere gratitude to you for your valuable services, and your devotion and tenderness over the sick bed of our late beloved friend. God knows I have deeply sympathised with you in the painful responsibility of your situation and I can well assure that everything which the soundest medical judgment and the deepest solicitude could suggest was done. In the feelings of all around me here, who dearly loved him, you and Dr. Prichard are spoken of with sincere and grateful respect, and the blessing of a just man made perfect now rests upon you.

Your account of the change in your feelings towards the Raja from the influence of the reports that had reached you, has very deeply affected me, for knowing the Rajah so well, it is the most striking evidence of the force of the human prejudice that I have hitherto met with,—I mean on the part of those who misrepresented him to you; for your yielding to those representations arose from the same sensibility that led you first to admire him in his works. I thank God that you had an opportunity of tearing yourself the veil from your eyes, and that the primitive love and admiration you cherished for him was confirmed by your personal intercourse with him; confirmed to be rendered immutable by the seal of Death!

To me he stood alone in the single majesty of, I had almost said perfect humanity. No one in past history or in the present time

single majesty of, I had almost said, perfect humanity. No one in past history, or in present time ever came ever came before my judgment clothed in such wisdom, grace and humility. I knew of no tendency even to error. To say he was not the disciple of Christ, that he even smiled in approbation of infidelity, and joined those thoughtless and weak and ignorant men who set themselves up against the testimonies of the human heart, which asserts the truth of religion against the wit and follies of the vainest and the cleverest head, is to belie his whole life. I have often talked with him on religious subjects and have seen him among sceptics. He was never more free and unembarrassed and cheerful than when arguing with those who had a logical and acute mind, he often told me that he always introduced the subject when he met the historian of India, and that his object in the argument was to show the insufficiency of human reason for the production of the highest moral worth, and the highest happiness. He even contended that 'the spirit that was in Christ Jesus and unknown and unrevealed till his mission directed the human mind to more elevated purer and more disinterested thoughts, motives and actions, than the noblest philosophy of antiquity did or could do ; that the Christian precepts left nothing to desire or to hope for through futurity ; that as a system of morality, it was alone able to lead to purity and happiness here, and to form the mind for any conceivable state of advancement hereafter. He often beautifully said, 'I can never hope in my day to find mankind of one faith, and it is my duty to exercise the charities of life with all men.' He did not go about with the spirit of proselytism. He argued only for the sense of religious obligation, and emphatically assured us that all his experience of life had exhibited to him virtue and self-respect and happiness in its true elements, even in proportion to the intensity of that sense. He was the humblest of human beings, and ardent as he was in the faith, of his selection he was sensibly disturbed if religion was spoken lightly of, or argued but reverentially before woman. He would often smile and speak jocosely when the turn of the discussion made him uneasy from his sensibilities towards woman being awakened : and those who knew him, saw by his manner and looks that he

before my judgment clothed in such wisdom, grace and humanity. I knew of no tendency even to error.

adopted this lightness of manner in hopes that the subject would be dropped.

I was once in his presence where a father was expressing doubts of Christianity before two of his daughters, who were near forty and before three other ladies. He expressed himself most forcibly in defence of the immutable truth of religion, and when the conversation was resumed by the sceptic, he touched lightly and with levity on the diction and expressions of the other, and often in the intervals sat as if he were abstracted and unconcerned in what was said ; and when appealed to, he in the same careless manner criticised the language of his opponent, without touching the sense. A lady whom he loved sat by me, and said in an under tone to me ; "The Raja appears to smile at everything." I replied, 'Your words import more than you mean, and you mistake his present feelings ; he is visibly distressed, and wishes the subject to be dropped. She observed him closely and said I was right, as he took an early opportunity of calling his attention to something else. He soon after left the party. I had an engagement with him the next morning, and the first subject he spoke of was the conversation of the night before, and he expressed himself highly offended that a father should before his own daughters, confess his infidelity, and so far forget himself as to say anything to shake the faith of a female. He added, 'it is more painful to me to argue with sceptics before women, for there is no hope of its leading to good, and there must be pain where it is our duty to give pleasure always ; I never permitted religion to be discussed before my daughters or wife.' I can only say that at every visit my admiration of him grew with my intimacy with his mind and actions. He was the most liberal, the most amiable, the most candid of men. His generosity was unbounded ; his most touching politeness was an instinct of his nature ; it never left him to his most familiar associates ; while he paid just deference to rank in obedience to the conventional etiquette of society, he honoured above all men the poor gardener whom he met with in some rich establishment in India, who had, uninfluenced by the authority of his superiors, examined the scriptures, and adopted the faith of the unity of God. He went to the garden every day to talk with him ;

* * * He was the most liberal, the most amiable, the most candid of men. His generosity was unbounded,

he often said to us 'I could have taken him in my arms as a brother. I called with him on Dr. Tuckerman, Mr. Deway, and Mr. Phillips of America, and when he had shaken hands with them he said, with his countenance lighted up with emotion, 'I am so happy to be with Unitarians.' He did not mix in the sect as some expected, and reflections were often passed upon him. Mr. Fox has touched this with admirable force in his sermon. The object of the Raja was to mix with and know all sects. One of his greatest desires was to see Catholicism in Rome. He admired the obedience to duties in the Catholics and always spoke of them in this light with admiration. Whatever faults were mixed with their faith, he recognised in their attention to the poor and sick, the noblest spirit of Christianity. One of the last arguments I heard from him was his defence of them, against one who urged their acting under artificial stimulus. He contended that what they did was enforced on all, by the very example of Christ; and that the stimulus was their faith in the force and truth of that example.

But I must stop. When I think that I shall see him no more; that the beauty of his countenance, the picturesqueness of his eastern costume, the kind reception, the noble example of virtues never felt, at least so powerfully, in others, the hope I had entertained of his future usefulness, the certainty I had of his present happiness, and all his enlarged affections,—when I think that these have passed away forever of my brief existence, I feel a sorrow such as I never felt before, and one which can only find consolation in that pure religion of which he was so able a defender. His loss has given tenfold value in my mind to his writings, and I have studied them with a subdued feeling since his death, and risen from their perusal with a more confirmed conviction of his having been unequalled in past or present time. Peace to his sacred memory!

Present my best respects to Miss Acland and Dr. Carpenter, and believe me,

My dear Sir,
Sincerely and gratefully yours
T. BOOT.

his most touching politeness was an instinct of his nature, it never left him to his most familiar associates."

Such high estimates bordering almost on extravagance, were not in the least exaggerated. The character of Rammohun Roy with the noblest qualities of the intellect, heart and soul harmoniously developed was really a picture of perfect symmetry. In the combination of intellectual greatness with breadth of sympathy and nobleness of soul, it was an example of almost as complete a humanity as has ever been seen in the history of our race. Even the outward features were proportionate to the grandeur of the mind within, as will be seen from following sketch, which appeared in the Court Journal of London for Oct. 5. 1833, just a week after his death. "The Raja in the outer man, was cast in nature's finest mould: his figure was manly and robust. his carriage dignified: the forehead towering, expansive and commanding: the eye dark, restless, full of brightness and animation, yet liquid and benevolent and frequently glistening with a tear when affected by the deeper sensibility of the heart; the nose of Roman form and proportions; lips full and indicative of independence; the whole features deeply expressive, with a smile of soft and peculiar fascination and which won irresistibly the suffrages to whom it was addressed."*

* This description is in complete agreement with that by Dr. Carpenter, and with the portrait now in the Bristol Museum, painted by Briggs R. A. which was pronounced by Dr. Carpenter as the best portrait extant. "It gives, indeed, the impression of a less bulky

Dr. Carpenter quoted the following description of the Raja's personal appearance from the Asiatic Journal: "The person of Rammohun Roy was a very fine one. He was nearly six feet high; his limbs were robust and well proportioned, though latterly, either through age or increase of bulk he appeared rather unwieldly and inactive. His face was beautiful; the features large and manly, the forehead lofty and expanded, the eyes dark and animated, the nose finely curved and of due proportion, the lips full and the general expression of the countenance that of intelligence and benignity."

The intellectual powers of Rammohun Roy were admittedly of an extraordinary type. The inscription on his tomb at Bristol puts the matter modestly when it says, "To great natural talents he united a thorough mastery of many languages and early distinguished himself as one of the greatest scholars of his day." The intellectual eminence of the man was in evidence before he passed out of boyhood: at the early age of sixteen, he composed a book against idol-worship, which appeared to his father formidable. In mature life, the great powers of his intellect stamped themselves on everything to which he put his hand; whoever came into contact with him felt the impress of a superior mind.

person than the Raja's was, in at least the latter part of life; and the mouth does not satisfy me in its form or its expression, but the rest of the countenance, the attitude of the figure, the hands—beautifully significant as well as masterly painted give that expression to the whole which those who contemplate Rammohun Roy as the Hindu sage and reformer would most desire."

One manifestation of the rare intellectual powers of Rammohun Roy was in his marvellous mastery over many different languages. His knowledge of Sanskrit literature in its various branches was profound. In Arabic and Persian he was thoroughly at home, which got him the title of *Zabardust Moulvie*. At an advanced age he commenced the study of Hebrew and Greek and acquired a perfect mastery over these two different languages, so much so that his English biographer says with perfect justice: "The acquaintance which he shows with Hebrew and Greek and with expository literature is, considering his antecedents, little less than marvellous."

His command over the English language was a marvel to all who knew him. It was not until he was twenty-two that he began to learn English; but within a short time he came to wield a beautiful style of writing, which was the envy of many English men of letters. In a letter to the Raja, Jeremy Bentham, the celebrated philosopher wrote: "Your works are made known to me by a book, in which I read a style which but for the name of a Hindu, I should certainly have ascribed to the pen of a superiorly educated and instructed Englishman." In the same letter while praising the great work of James Mill on the History of India, he makes the remark, "though as to style I wish I could with truth and sincerity pronounce it equal to yours."*

As a theologian, Rammohun Roy was incomparable

* Vide Bowring's *Works of B. ntham*, vol. x., p. 586.

in his day. He was equally at home in Hindu, Christian and Mahomedan theology; and he could and did, single-handed, hold his own against Hindu Pandits, Christian Missionaries and Mahomedan Moulavies in religious discussions. Rammohun Roy has justly been called the greatest intellect of our country since Sankaracharya. The biographer of Dr. Duff calls him the Erasmus of India.

His vast learning and subtle powers of debate made him a most formidable controversialist. The editor of the *Indian Gazettee*, in reviewing his *Final Appeal* to the Christian Public, spoke of the Raja as "a most gigantic combatant in the theological field—a combatant who, we are constrained to say, has not met with his match here." One Mr. Anderson of the firm of Colvin & Co. of Calcutta, once said that at his house conferences used to take place frequently between Rammohun Roy and learned European gentlemen of the time, and he heard the latter invariably saying at the close of the discussions, "we will think over the matter." One admirable feature of Rammohun Roy was that he never lost his temper in controversy.

Rammohun Roy had a very quick and at the same time, tenacious memory. Once a Pandit came to the Raja to wrangle on a certain Tantra. Rammohun Roy had never read the book. So he fixed an hour the following day for discussion. After the Pandit had left he procured a copy of the Tantra from the library of Shova Bazar Raja and applied himself to it. Next day the Pandit came at the appointed hour and there was a hard discussion; the points raised by his opponent

were answered by the Raja to the satisfaction of all, and the Pandit went away discomfitted.

His application and powers of concentration of mind were equally great. While at Radhanagar, one morning after the bath, he entered his study and began to read the Ramayana of Valmiki, which he had not read before. He had asked people not to disturb him. The hour of dinner was over, yet none dared to approach him. When the ninth hour was past his mother asked an old gentleman to go to him in his study. As the latter peeped in, the Raja made a sign requesting to be excused a little longer. It is said that he finished the whole of the Ramayana at that one sitting.

Rammohun Roy kept up his studious habits to the last. Mr. Sutherland, a fellow-passenger with the Raja on his voyage to Europe, tells us that "on board the ship during the greater part of the day he read, chiefly Sanskrit and Hebrew."

Great as the Raja was in intellect, he excelled still more in the virtues of the heart. His sympathy extended to the farthest corners of the earth, while he had a most tender feeling for those near to him. He was a model of domestic virtues. Though not himself very fortunate in domestic life, he treated all his relations with a regard and affection undisturbed by their conduct. In spite of his parents' uncommonly harsh dealing with him, he always proved a loving and dutiful son. Of his mother Dr. Carpenter says: "Through the influence of superstitious bigotry, she had been among his most bitter opponents. He, however, manifested a warm and affectionate attachment towards her: and it

was with a glistening eye that he told us she had 'repented' of her conduct towards him. Though convinced that his doctrines were true, she could not throw off the shackles of idolatrous customs." "Rammohun" she said to him before she set out on her last pilgrimage to Juggernath, where she died, 'you are right; but I am a weak woman, and am grown too old to give up those observances which are a comfort to me.' The Raja was likewise a most generous and loving friend. To servants and inferiors he was always extremely kind and courteous.

His sympathies were wide as the world. Everything that tended to the good of his fellow beings warmly appealed to his loving nature. The sufferings of his countrymen were a heavy load on his heart. It was this that led him to scorn delights and live laborious days. In England, while at Church, he was often found to shed tears, though there was nothing in the sermon to occasion it. Once a friend asked him what made him weep. The Raja replied that the remembrance of his poor countrymen gave him no rest. The miseries of Indian women made a deep impression on his tender heart at an early age; and throughout his life he laboured hard and incessantly to improve their lot; as witness his efforts for the abolition of *Sati*, his exposure of the evils of polygamy and Kulinism, his protest against the modern encroachments on women's rights in the property of parents and husbands. In fact, the cause of women seemed to appeal to him in a special manner. Even European ladies were struck by his deference to and sympathy for women. Miss Lucy Aikin

in a letter to Dr. Channing soon after the death of the Raja (Dated Hampstead, October, 23, 1833) wrote of him: "Scarcely any description can do justice to his admirable qualities, and the charms of his society, his extended knowledge, his comprehension of mind, his universal philanthropy, his tender humanity, his genuine dignity mixed with perfect courtesy, and the most touching humility. His memory I shall cherish with affectionate reverence on many accounts, but the character in which I best love to contemplate him is that of the friend and champion of woman. It is impossible to forget his righteous zeal against polygamy, his warm approval of the freedom allowed to women in Europe, his joy and pious gratitude for the abolition of *suttee*. Considering the prejudices of birth and education with which he had to contend, his constant advocacy of the rights and interests of the weaker sex seems to me the very strongest proof of his moral and intellectual greatness."

The fact is, every form of injustice and tyranny excited strong, righteous indignation in him, and to all worthy, struggling causes he gave his whole-hearted sympathy and support. Whether it was the fight for constitutional government in Spain, the struggle of the Italians for emancipation from the Austrian-yoke, the agitation for good government of Ireland, the conflict over the abolition of slavery in America, or the movement for the amelioration of the condition of Indian women, Rammohun Roy's sympathy poured in unstinted measure on the side of justice and humanity. Distance of space and differences of language and nationality seemed to produce no deterring influence on his great mind. When the intelligence reached India that the people of Naples, after extorting a constitution from their despotic King, were crushed back into servitude by the Austrian troops in obedience to the joint mandate of the crowned heads of Russia, Prussia, Austria, Sardinia and Naples, Rammohun Roy wrote to Mr. Buckingham, begging to be excused from an important engagement, as he was much "depressed"

by the late news from Europe" "From the late unhappy news", he goes on to add, "I am obliged to conclude that I shall not live to see liberty universally restored to the nations of Europe, and Asiatic nations, specially those that are European colonies, possessed of a greater degree of the same blessing than what they now enjoy. Under these circumstances I consider the the cause of the Neapolitans as my own, and their enemies as ours. Enemies to liberty and friends of despotism have never been, and never will be, ultimately successful."

Love of freedom was the passion of his soul. He exulted in the triumph of liberty in any quarter of the globe. The story is told by Miss Collet how at Cape Colony on his way to England, the sight of the tricolour flag on two French ships lying at anchor in Table Bay fired his enthusiasm. Lame as he then was, owing to a serious fall from the gangway ladder, he insisted on visiting them. The sight of the republican flag seemed to render him insensible to pain. When the news of the three day's revolution at Paris in July, 1830 reached Calcutta, his enthusiasm was so great that "he could think or talk of nothing else." And we are told that, when the news of the establishment of a constitutional government in Spain was received in India, Rammohun Roy gave a public dinner in Calcutta. His feelings about the British Reform Bill of 1832 are well-known. He had publicly avowed that, in the event of the Bill being defeated, he would renounce his connection with England for all subsequent times. When the Bill was passing through its concluding stages in the House of Lords, his excitement was so great that he could not even write to his friends.

His cosmopolitan sympathies were so genuine and earnest, that whoever came into contact with him imbibed them insensibly. He seemed to move in a lofty atmosphere of large humanity and world-wide sympathy. Miss Aikin, writing under date, September 6th, 1831, says: "Just now my feelings are more

cosmopolitan than usual ; I take a personal concern in a third quarter of the globe, since I have seen the excellent Rammohun Roy."

Rammohun's will-power was, likewise, of an extraordinary character. His was a will determined, as Mr. Adam tells us, with singular energy and uncontrollable self-direction to lofty and generous purposes. He seemed to feel, to think, to speak, to act as if he could not but do all this, and that he must and could do it only *from* and *through* himself, and that the application of any external influence distinct from his own strong will would be the annihilation of his being and identity. He would be free or not be at all.....Love of freedom was perhaps the strongest passion of his soul,—freedom not of action merely, but of thought. No external pressure could deflect him an inch from the course he had chalked out for himself, no obstacles, however serious, daunted him. Dr. Carpenter once wrote : "It always seemed to me that his was a mind which, while looking to a higher guidance, was to shape its own course." His great mind moved straight to its appointed goal or end undeterred by frown or favour, impediments or inconveniences. Failure never discouraged him, fear never overtook his stout heart.

This strength of will and independence of mind had been in evidence even in the boy, as when, for his anti-idolatrous attitude the lad of sixteen was turned out of the ancestral home, to wander without friend or fortune over the country and even beyond its borders, then so full of unspeakable dangers. Nor did he return home, until called back when the natural, parental love had asserted itself over the religious bigotry of his father. This was a feat which would alone suffice to mark him out as an extraordinary man—*enfant terrible*.

The same love of independence dictated his stipulations with Mr. William Digby when accepting Government service under him. Evidently he had been known to Mr. Digby for sometime, and the latter

would appear to have been attracted towards him and possibly himself offered the appointment. Rammohun Roy was in need of some employment; owing to the strained relations with his family, he was to earn his livelihood. But even then his self-respect would not allow him to submit to the degrading ways of the civilians of those days. He made an express condition that Mr. Digby in his intercourse should uniformly treat him as a gentleman,—a condition which, be it recorded to the honour of that worthy Englishman, was always scrupulously observed. Again, from a more exalted personage than Mr. Digby Rammohun Roy did not flinch from exacting the same deference. It is said that Lord William Bentinck, the then Governor-General, once had occasion to consult him on some important matter and so sent over one of his *aides-de-camp* for him. To this messenger from the Governor-General, Rammohun Roy made answer, "I have now given up all worldly avocations, and am engaged in religious culture and in the investigation of truth. Kindly express my humble respects to the Governor-General and inform him that I have no inclination to appear before his august presence, and therefore I hope that he will pardon me." The *aid-de-camp*, wondering at the audacity of the man, reported the matter to Lord Bentinck, who enquired what he had said to Rammohun Roy. The *aid-de-camp* replied, "I told him that Lord William Bentinck, the Governor-General, would be pleased to see him." The Governor-General answered, "Go back and tell him again that Mr. William Bentinck will be highly obliged if he will kindly see him once." This done, Rammohun Roy visited the Governor-General, whose relations with him ever afterwards continued as respectful as they were cordial.

It is, too, this refined sense of self-respect that explains the remarkable outburst of feeling at the overtures of Bishop Middleton, who held out prospects of honour and advancement in case Rammohun Roy should embrace Christianity. The whole story is

narrated in details by Miss Collet on the authority of Mr. Adam ; and it need not be repeated here.

Yet Rammohun Roy was one of the most modest and considerate of men that ever lived. This 'tenacity of personal independence, this sensitive jealousy of the slightest approach to encroachment on his mental freedom was', Mr. Adam is careful to add, "accompanied with a very nice perception of the equal rights of others, even of those who differed most widely from him." To high and low, and to the low even more than to the high, he was by nature and on principle always courteous with religious scrupulousness. Mrs. Davidson, the wife of a minister in London, to one of whose children the Raja was god-father, wrote of him, "for surely never was there a man of so much modesty and humility ! I used to feel quite ashamed of the reverential manner in which he behaved with me. Had I been our queen, I could not have been approached and taken leave of with more respect."

It was finally his strength of will, combined with his faith in God, that carried him through the innumerable difficulties on his path amidst the determined opposition of the Hindus and Christian missionaries alike ; the more unscrupulous of his adversaries even went the length of attempting his life. He had to walk in the streets of Calcutta armed with swords and revolvers. For some he was compelled to go to and come back from the Brahma Mandir with the windows of his carriage shut for fear of being stoned. But single-handed, he stood firm against all violence as against all seductions. He was not the man to be seduced from his God-ordained work by any under-hand or unfair means. When the Baptist Missionaries declined to print in their press his reply to their attacks, hoping thereby to silence him, as there was no other press then in Calcutta, Rammohun forthwith set up a press of his own at a considerable cost and trouble to himself, and brought out the "Final Appeal to the Christian public." Though a small thing, this

circumstance is a characteristic indication of the energy and determination of Rammohun Roy. One is also struck with the unbounded faith and perseverance of the man. It is remarkable how, though his repeated memorials to Government had been set aside with scant courtesy, he still went on urging on the authorities here and in England the needs and grievances of his countrymen. Everything leaves the impression of a man of indomitable will and unconquerable tenacity of purpose.

At the same time the Raja was the most gentle and unassuming of men. In matters which did not involve the surrender of principle he was always yielding and conciliatory. People frequently took advantage of his goodness; and though he was well aware of it, he would not mind it. Miss Carpenter, who speaks from personal knowledge, says; "The extraordinary courteousness and suavity of his general demeanour, and his habitual care to avoid giving unnecessary pain, would have made those who enjoyed his society think of him only as a most delightful and intellectual companion, did not some observation incidentally reveal what were the ever-present subjects of his thoughts." The Rev. Mr. Fox in the memorial sermon preached after the Raja's death said: "In social intercourse he endeared himself to natives of many countries and to persons of all parties, ranks and ages; attracting a regard which no celebrity could have conciliated but which flowed spontaneously toward that goodness which in him was the soul of greatness." This giant in intellect and energy of will was simple as a child in private and social dealings.

Lastly, as to the religious depth and fervour of this man of God. The extraordinary intellectual powers and uncommon energy of will of Rammohun Roy have somewhat overshadowed his no less remarkable depth of devotion. There are people who, dazzled by his intellectual eminence and public activities, fail to recognise his spiritual greatness; yet religion was the under-current, "the master bias," of his many-

sided genius. His English biographer says with true insight, "He was above all and beneath all a religious personality. The many and far-reaching ramifications of his prolific energy were forth-puttings of one purpose. The root of his life was religion. He would never have been able to go so far or to move his countrymen so mightily as he did but for the driving power of an intense theistic passion." The worship of the one True God was the mission of his life and the delight of his soul. To establish the spiritual worship of the spirit-God, the Father of all mankind, was the supreme concern of his life. Wherever he went he first strove to win a band of fellow worshippers. Long before the foundation of the Brahmo Samaj and while he was yet in the service of the East India Company at Rungpur, we find him bringing together, with great difficulty, a few kindred susceptible souls for joint religious exercises. As soon as he arrived in Calcutta, he formed the Atmiya Sabha, the chief object of which was spiritual worship, and later on he organised the Unitarian Committee for purely theistic worship. Prior to this, he constantly attended the Scotch Presbyterian services at St. Andrew's Church, Calcutta, though he did not fully agree with their religious views; so strong was his hankering for religious worship. Rammohun Roy's cook who had accompanied him to England and had opportunities of knowing him intimately, said that "worship of God was Rammohun Roy's first daily work." Miss Hare, who was a constant companion of the Raja during his residence in England, noticed that, often, even while driving in the streets, he would close his eyes and offer up silent prayers to God.

He longed for daily domestic service; but alas, this hankering remained unsatisfied. Soon after his arrival in Calcutta he went to visit the Baptist missionaries of Serampore and stayed for the family prayer in the house of Rev. Mr. Carey, with which, says one of the missionaries, "he was delighted". Mr. Carey

presented him with a copy of Dr. Watt's 'Hymns'. The Raja promised he would treasure up the hymns in his heart; and so he did, carrying the book with him to the last days of his life. It has been stated on the authority of an associate of the Raja, that "Whenever he spoke of universal religion he was so much moved that tears came out from his eyes." People generally think of Rammohun Roy as an intellectual giant, a great theologian and reformer, but he was not more intellectual than devout and emotional. His love for Hafiz and Saadi witnesses to the emotional side of his religion. He was far from an abstract theologian; he was not a mere dry Vedantist; but in him there was a happy harmony of *Jnana*, *Bhakti*, and *Karma*, the intellectual, emotional and practical aspects of religion. His many-sided activities were the outcome of his inner spiritual life. To him as he used to say constantly, the service of man was the highest expression and fruition of worship.

Such was the great personality, who heralded the dawn of a new era in India at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

নূতন পুস্তক !

নূতন পুস্তক !!

গৌড়ীয়

বৈষ্ণবধর্ম ও চৈতন্যদেব

শ্রীযুক্ত হেনচন্দ্র সরকার এম, এ প্রণীত ।

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